

PART II

FAMILY PLANNING

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INTRODUCTION

Family Planning has been a delicate and controversial subject in both the developed and the developing countries. It has been a delicate subject because there is some element in all of us, however open minded we might be, that frowns against open discussion of matters related to sex. It has also been controversial because it has been plagued by ideologies that have sought to interpret international and inter-governmental co-operation in the field as colonialist machinations against developing countries which are aimed at corrupting the youth, destroying long cherished cultural practices and leading to general moral depravity of such nations, particularly since the argument is equally appealing that large populations determine the might of nations.

These nice problems notwithstanding, Governments increasingly found after World War II that to meet the rising expectations of their peoples for higher living standards they had to deal with the population problem. Ghana had to face the problem when the 1960 Population Census revealed that the unadjusted intercensal growth rate was 4.2 per cent per annum between 1948 and 1960. It was doubtful whether the reasonable and proper expectations for a better life could be met for those living and the anticipated ten million consumers who would arrive in the next seventeen years if the population should continue to grow annually at that rate. These led to the adoption of a Population Policy and the eventual establishment of the National Family Planning Programme in 1970.

The Ghana National Family Planning Programme has been developed as an important component among others of the developmental process because it is believed that the attainment of long-term national goals whether in terms of increased per capita Gross Domestic Product school enrolment rates or per capita medical services involves not only an alternate numerator (GDP) but an alterable denominator (total population) as well. And yet the factors that affect both the numerator and the denominator are multivarious. Hence it is important to underscore the multi-dimensional approach that is needed to deal with both the population and development problems.

The following three papers dovetail beautifully since they deal with some of the pre-conditions for a successful family planning programme and the lessons of experience that these throw out for new programmes like the Ghana National Family Planning Programme (GNFPP).

Maxine Kumekpor traces the beginnings of family planning in the developed and developing countries and notes that whilst the idea of fertility limitation came to the now developed countries in the wake of socio-economic developments and therefore did not require governmental involvement, conditions in the developing countries today demand that fertility limitation has to be planned to be effective. She cautions however that planned demographic change has a better chance of acceptability and success if it is undertaken as part of welfare planning in general.

Thus the family planning field-worker has a better chance of success if he functions as part of a team that is interested in the total welfare needs of the community. GNFPP needs to develop more effectively its information programmes so that the rural population in particular would be aware of the relationship between their welfare and fertility behaviour and once convinced about their need for family planning must know about contraceptive devices availability and their subsidized prices.

Dr. Lila Engberg asserts that family planning programmes are not new concerns and that the history of past performance of such programmes in other countries would seem to suggest that under-takings have better chances of success when the target population is already self-assertive in other areas of social and economic life. She observes that large family sizes have been sustained in traditional societies because beliefs backed by both positive and negative sanctions have buttressed such a norm. Until such beliefs and practices change in themselves it is futile to expect women within such a system to change their birth control practices. The systems approach advocated by Dr. Engberg then sees family planning as an integral part of the overall development approach which suits the community situation and not as an isolated attempt at social change. In a sense Dr. Engberg agrees with Mrs Kumekpor about the general content of family planning but moves the discussion a step further by offering a methodological construct, i.e. systems approach to deal with the complex population and development issues.

Dr. Christine Oppong offers a definitive set of information needed for the effective planning of family planning efforts. She explores in her paper the phenomenon which has been aptly described as "retreat from parenthood." Through the analysis of a research activity conducted in Accra, Dr. Oppong reported that women respondents regarded four children as the right family size and the men six. This suggests that at least in the urban centres of Ghana changes in the social system have been such that the target population for family planning services are already reacting positively to planned parenthood as a way of life. She makes the important observation that respondents felt strongly that more attention should be paid to motivating husbands for family planning that educational programmes should emphasize the health hazards and financial strains involved in women and men wishing to stop having children as late as ages 35 and 45 respectively. The study also indicates that desired family size is affected by mobility of the couple.

The papers draw conclusions that are pertinent for programme planning and implementation. But for me what is even more important is the effort of our higher institutions to subject to critical analysis factors that affect the rather complex issue of family planning. It is hoped that the multi-dimensional nature of the issues involved in population planning will make for a closer working relationship of researchers and programme planners for a more successful family planning effort in the country.

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